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PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight

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ABC Network

DATE February 16, 1983 7:00 PM

CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT

AWACS Planes Deployed to Egypt

FRANK REYNOLDS: The decision was made during the weekend. The President personally approved it and once again American planes and ships have been moved into position to deal with a threat to peace from Libya's leader to Colonel Qaddafi.

JOHN MCWETHY: ABC News has learned that the United States has secretly deployed four early warning AWACS planes to Egypt on short notice and has rushed the aircraft carrier Nimitz and three escort ships from the coast of Lebanon to Libya. Officially the Pentagon says it is all part of exercises in the region.

Unofficially, Intelligence sources say the movement is a direct result of an apparent military buildup by Libya spotted in the southeastern corner of that country, a buildup which Pentagon sources fear could foreshadow a move to overthrow the pro-American government of Sudan headed by President Gaafar Nimeiri.

The Libyan buildup, which includes several dozen Soviet-made combat aircraft, has caused so much concern that Egypt is preparing to reposition some of its forces to the Sudan-Libyan-Egyptian border region.

Last week Egypt's President Mubarak put in an urgent request for American assistance. As the seriousness of the threat grew, decision to send the AWACS plans was made by President Reagan last weekend. The aircraft are not flying surveillance missions along the troubled border.

~~ABC News has been told, if Libya does move militarily, Egyptian fighters, being guided by American AWACS planes, will~~
~~WASHINGTON DET NEW YORK LOS ANGELES CHICAGO DETROIT AND OTHER PRINCIPAL CITIES~~
~~EGYPT FIGHTERS BEING GUIDED BY~~

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make the intercept.

The U.S. aircraft carrier Nimitz is now operating in international waters off Libya, near the Gulf of Sidra. This is the same disputed body of water over which American F-14s in 1981 shot down two Libyan fighters during a U.S. Naval exercise.

Underscoring the gravity of today's situation, movement of the Nimitz leaves the American Marines in Lebanon for the first time without an aircraft carrier to back them up.

High ranking Pentagon officials stress that all moves by the U.S. and Egypt are being made for just one purpose, to discourage Libya's erratic leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi from starting a war, a military action which American analysts believe he could begin at anytime, but hope he will now reconsider.

John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.